

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
TOURISM BUSINESSES

May 28, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Downtown Yellowknife is home to many businesses that have been hard-hit by the lockdown resulting from the pandemic. The Chief Public Health Officer ordered some businesses to close, such as restaurants and bars, hair salons and barbers, dentists, and yoga studios, to name a few. Our once-thriving international tourism industry is on its knees. Other businesses have adjusted their operations to comply with the public health orders by allowing a limited number of people in and reducing hours to accommodate extra cleaning.

Mr. Speaker, the result of these changes has been dramatic. Some businesses had no revenue coming in at all and still don't. Tourism operators have no hope of seeing international visitors for at least a year and have started to close. Businesses that stayed open have seen their revenue fall by as much as 90 percent. Owners are worried about how to keep their staff, how to pay their rent, and what to do about inventory on order.

To put it bluntly, the GNWT has been less than helpful in this situation. The Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment announced a business advisory council would bring the business sector together to chart a course through this unprecedented shutdown. More than two months later, we are still waiting for the Minister to launch the council.

Meanwhile, in the Yukon, their council of businesspeople went to work within days of being announced. They created a unique \$10 million business support program three weeks later. Here, in the NWT, the Minister's efforts to support business with BDIC has resulted in a total of \$1.6 million being spent. That's in spite of the fact that BDIC has a surplus of over \$30 million. Other new initiatives for small business amount to fiddling while Rome is burning.

Mr. Speaker, we often hear that homegrown small business is the heart of our economy, but the GNWT has not treated the sector in a way that acknowledges the value it provides. Sure, BDIC is offering loans and interest deferrals, but many businesses are leery about going further into debt because they don't know how they will repay the money. Fortunately for northern small business, the federal government has taken up some slack by providing grants through the Northern Business Relief Fund, but that doesn't let GNWT off the hook. The GNWT has been missing in action when it comes to putting its money where its mouth is by supporting small business. I will have questions for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.